



RETURN OF THE JEDI?

On the eve of the release of *The Last Jedi*, let's indulge in some last minute speculation on what writer-director Rian Johnson has in store for Star Wars fans. Words Scott Hocking

It sure doesn't feel like two years have passed since a sense of excitement united the world in anticipation of the first Star Wars film in Disney/Lucasfilm's new trilogy, *The Force Awakens*.

In that time we've seen the first spin-off feature, *Rogue One*, but nothing quite compares to the thrill of a new Star Wars movie that is pure canon – i.e. a continuation of the Skywalker family story.

Three trailers and two behind-the-scenes featurettes have fuelled fan speculation over the ancestry of Rey, the destiny of Kylo Ren, and the nature of Supreme Leader Snoke, but of course major plot details remain as closely guarded as Jabba's palace.

What we do know from interviews with Mark Hamill and director Rian Johnson is that *The Last Jedi* will provide some answers as to what Luke Skywalker was up to between the events of *Return of the Jedi* and his cliffhanger cameo in *The Force Awakens*. Johnson has said these missing years were the starting point when writing Episode VIII, and with Luke once again a major player, it's the question everyone wants answered.

Ditto the lineage of the enigmatic Rey, and why she was abandoned on Jakku. Strong with the Force, is she. "I've seen this raw strength once before, it didn't scare me enough then, it does now," says Luke in the trailer. Is he referring to his new Padawan, or is this simply misdirection? Who will complete Rey's training – Luke or Kylo Ren? "This is not going to go the way you think," he adds, echoing the cast's promise to expect the unexpected.

Let's hope Johnson delivers on that promise and reins in the fan service that has dominated both *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One* (although there will be the obligatory cantina scene). The former's similarity to *A New Hope* was required to relaunch the franchise, but now that the new players have been introduced



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and the First Order established, it's time to venture beyond the comfort zone.

A host of new characters will be introduced in Episode VIII including Resistance officer Vice-Admiral Amilyn Holdo (Laura Dern), mechanic Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran), and Benicio del Toro's DJ, whom Johnson describes as "a shady character of unclear allegiances."

Then of course there is the Porg – the puffin-like creature spotted alongside Chewbacca that has become an instant Internet sensation – and First Order astromech droid BB-9E, who appears to be BB-8's evil twin. What role they play in the story remains to be seen, but one thing is certain – both will dominate toy sales this Christmas.

The other thing we can be sure of is that *The Last Jedi* will be a bittersweet return to a galaxy far, far away, being the last time we'll see the late Carrie Fisher as General Leia. The reunion with her long lost brother will be another highlight.

In a year that has been a revolving door for Star Wars directors (exit Colin Trevorrow, Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, enter Ron Howard and J.J. Abrams), it's encouraging that Rian Johnson was not only onboard for the entirety of *The Last Jedi* shoot, he's since been entrusted to develop a whole new trilogy. Such faith from Lucasfilm would suggest *The Last Jedi* is something special.

Despite Luke Skywalker's ominous declaration that "It's time for the Jedi to end," the Star Wars saga appears to be just warming up. 

→ **Star Wars: The Last Jedi**
is in cinemas on December 14

